



## GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY ACTIVITY 1

### Two Rivers in Mesopotamia

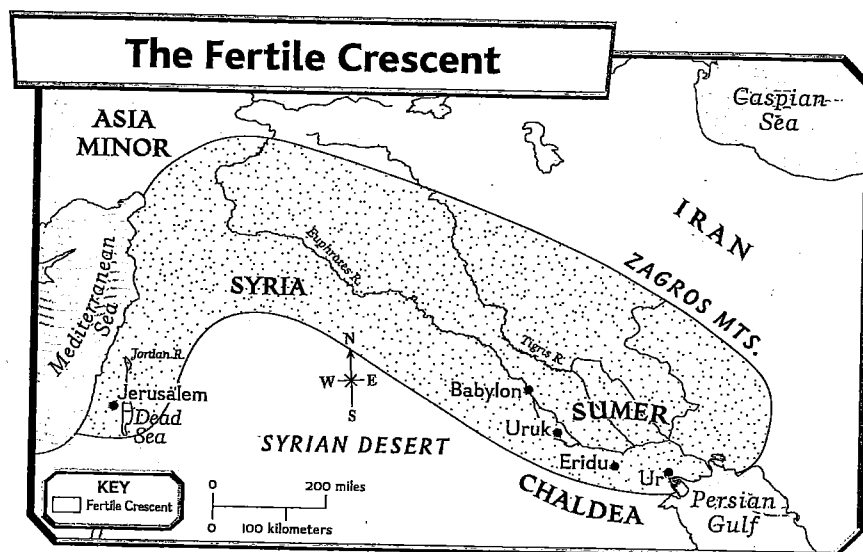
In the area of the Middle East that is today known as Iraq, there are two rivers called the Euphrates and the Tigris. They flow southward across the desert. For most of their length, the two rivers parallel each other. Then they join and empty into the Persian Gulf.

In ancient times, the land between them was called Mesopotamia. This name comes from the Greek words *mesos* meaning "middle" and *potamos* meaning "river." Mesopotamia literally means "land between the rivers." The region was at the eastern end of an area of good farmland known as the Fertile Crescent (see map below).

The waters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers helped one of the world's earliest civilizations to grow—the Sumerians. The people who lived in the region, known as Sumer, used the water for drinking and growing crops. The rivers were also used for transportation. Some of the earliest sailboats ever built carried people and goods up and down the rivers.

#### Flood Control and Irrigation

In the spring, the Tigris and Euphrates would flood. The ancient Sumerians learned how to control these floodwaters. They built earthen mounds called *levees* on both sides of the rivers. The Sumerians also learned how to channel the rivers' waters into fields where crops were grown—one of the world's first known examples of irrigation. The mineral-rich soil helped these early farmers to grow enough crops to feed the people. Wheat, barley, sesame, and other fruits and vegetables were the primary food crops. The farmers also grew flax, which was woven into clothes.



## GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

### Two Rivers in Mesopotamia

#### Trade and Writing

The development of wind-powered boats helped move crops and other goods up and down the rivers. A number of cities along the rivers became centers of trade. Some of the cities ~~were~~ <sup>in</sup> Sumer, ~~were~~ <sup>in</sup> Ur, Uruk, Eridu, and Babylon.

To help keep track of trade, the Sumerians created some of the world's earliest forms of writing. Literate men known as *scribes* would form tablets from clay from the rivers and carve small symbols into them while the clay was still soft. Using a sharpened reed known as a *stylus*, the scribe would mark records on the tablets and then leave them in the hot sun to dry. From this writing, called *cuneiform*, we have learned much about these ancient Mesopotamian cultures.

**Directions:** Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. What were the two major rivers of Mesopotamia? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What does the name Mesopotamia mean? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How did the people of Mesopotamia use the rivers? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Name some food crops grown by the ancient Mesopotamians.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. By looking at the map, name three bodies of water other than rivers.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. **Drawing Conclusions** Look at the land surrounding Mesopotamia on the map. How did the geography of Mesopotamia and the surrounding lands open the region to invasion?  
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